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Sixty-fifth year

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Monday, 18 October 2010, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Rugunda	(Uganda)
Members:	Austria	Ms. Juen
	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Mrs. Grgić-Stojanović
	Brazil	Mr. Rizzo
	China	Ms. Zhang Changwei
	France	Ms. Legendre
	Gabon	Mrs. Ntyam-Ehya
	Japan	Mr. Arima
	Lebanon	Mr. Ramadan
	Mexico	Mr. Pintado
	Nigeria	Mrs. Ogwu
	Russian Federation	Mr. Agasandyan
	Turkey	Mr. Söylemez
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Afshar
	United States of America	Ms. Germain

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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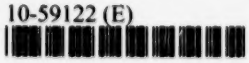

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The meeting resumed at 3.10 p.m.

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Costa Rica and Ecuador, in which they request to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the consideration of the item, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it was so decided.

At the invitation of the President, the representatives of the aforementioned countries took the seats reserved for them at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President: I wish to remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt): I have the pleasure to address the Security Council today on behalf of the States members of the Non-Aligned Movement. I would like to start by expressing the Movement's appreciation to you, Sir, for convening this debate under your presidency to address the critical situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, at this crucial juncture as the moment of truth is drawing closer than ever. I would also like to express our appreciation to Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his comprehensive briefing before the Council today.

Despite all the serious and credible efforts exerted by different international and regional parties to ensure the resumption and continuity of direct negotiations on the Palestinian track towards the achievement of the well-known and internationally supported objectives of peace, a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine remains regrettably far from being achieved, as Israel, the occupying Power, continues to pursue its illegal policies and practices, which are not only endangering the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders, but also rendering it practically impossible.

The Non-Aligned Movement reiterates its call on the international community to be resolute in demanding that Israel, the occupying Power, abide by its legal obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention, relevant United Nations resolutions and the Quartet Road Map. Israel must cease its unlawful colonization in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem; place a complete and indefinite freeze on all settlement activities, including so-called natural growth; and respond favourably and in good faith to the international consensus in this regard, including to the repeated demands of the United Nations, the European Union and the Quartet.

The Non-Aligned Movement expresses grave concern over the many possible repercussions of Israel's determination to continue illegal settlement construction and not to extend the partial ban or the so-called 10-month moratorium on settlement activities. The Non-Aligned Movement stresses that serious and genuine negotiations cannot be conducted while Israel continues to carry on such illegal actions and provocations, which are totally contradictory to the known tenets of a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Moreover, Israel's continuous expansion of settlement-building in the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem — the latest example of which is the recent announcement of the approval of 238 new housing units in East Jerusalem — destroys the mutual trust and confidence required for any successful negotiations and reveals that Israel has yet to abandon its expansionist goals and truly commit to the bases of the peace process, including the principle of land for peace. We reiterate our demand that Israel refrain from all such illegal and provocative actions aimed at prejudging the outcome of the final status negotiations, fulfil its obligations under the Road Map, and cooperate constructively with efforts to ensure the continuity of direct peace negotiations for the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive solution to the conflict in the Middle East.

In this regard, we are all aware of the unanimous global conviction that Israel must respect its obligations as an occupying Power as an imperative condition for materializing the two-State solution and creating an environment conducive to achieving a lasting solution based on the agreed terms of reference: resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008); the Madrid terms of reference,

including the principle of land for peace; the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

We are assured that the Palestinian Authority is, in word and deed, determined, with Arab support, to pursue the path of peace. This was reflected clearly in the statement of the Arab follow-up committee, convened in Sirte recently, and it is now incumbent upon Israel to show equal commitment, despite all the negative signals from the Israeli side in the past few months. Further, on the ground, the Palestinian Authority, with international support, also continues to exert efforts positively and constructively to lay the foundations and build national institutions in preparation for the independence of the Palestinian State. Those efforts must be fully supported.

On the Israeli side, however, we continue to witness growing acts of violence by settlers against Palestinian civilians, including children, as well as the burning of Islamic places of worship, orchards and agricultural fields. The Non-Aligned Movement is also alarmed by the increased issuing of additional home-demolition orders in occupied East Jerusalem and the revocation of residency rights of yet more Palestinian Jerusalemites, including elected Palestinian Legislative Council representatives. The Movement is deeply concerned regarding these illegal actions, which represent clear attempts to alter the demography and character of the city and to prejudge the outcome of the future permanent status negotiations, imperiling the basis of the two-State solution. Moreover, the Jewish loyalty oath bill, adopted recently by the Israeli Cabinet, represents yet another attempt to isolate the Palestinian-Arab minority in Israel and to illegally force their movement outside the State of Israel at the same time that more Palestinian land is being seized and occupied by settlers supported by the Israeli Government.

The Non-Aligned Movement believes that concrete steps need to be taken during the coming period to immediately resume direct negotiations. The complete freeze of all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, is essential for such a resumption. The international community should put forward a formula for a final settlement, or rather an endgame based on the well-known and internationally agreed parametres in this regard, which will lead to the independence of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The situation in Gaza also remains among the Non-Aligned Movement's top priorities. The Movement reiterates that the unacceptable and unsustainable situation of the Gaza Strip has to come to an end. This unresolved crisis continues to have serious repercussions on the efforts for peace and to inflict deep suffering on the Palestinian civilian population. International humanitarian law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention and United Nations resolutions, must fully apply and be respected by the occupying Power. In this regard, the Non-Aligned Movement emphasizes the need to press Israel to lift fully its illegal blockade, pursuant to resolution 1860 (2009), General Assembly resolution ES-10/18 and other relevant United Nations resolutions. This is essential to addressing the critical humanitarian and socio-economic situation in Gaza and to alleviating the many hardships being endured by the Palestinian civilian population.

In this connection, the Movement re-emphasizes the urgent need for the reconstruction of Gaza and calls on Israel to allow the import of essential reconstruction materials, including those necessary for the long-overdue reconstruction of United Nations facilities and schools of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and to enable economic revival in Gaza. We reiterate the need for a sustainable regime for opening all Israeli border crossings with Gaza and enabling the free movement of persons and goods in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law.

Turning now to Lebanon, the Non-Aligned Movement remains deeply concerned over Israel's ongoing violations of Lebanese sovereignty, in breach of resolution 1701 (2006). The Movement calls on all concerned parties to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006) in order to end the current fragility and to avoid the recurrence of hostilities.

Concerning the occupied Syrian Golan, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms that all measures and actions taken or to be taken by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israeli measures to impose jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and have no legal effect. The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel abide by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to thank you wholeheartedly, Sir, for convening this meeting. We also thank the Permanent Representative of Turkey and the members of his delegation for their efforts last month. I further thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing to the Council this morning.

This open debate has been convened in circumstances that do not augur well for the Middle East, given Israel's feverish efforts to obliterate our last hopes to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region through its unprecedented aggressive policies in the Arab territories occupied since 1967. While the entire world seeks to establish a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and insists that the achievement of peace is an urgent prerequisite for the maintenance of international and regional peace and security, it is astonished by Israel's continued beating of the drums of war, appropriation of land, ongoing settlement activity, blockade of Gaza and threats to again expel millions of Palestinians from their homeland under the racist pretext of affirming the Jewish identity of the State of Israel — an outdated policy whose consequences are known to all.

These practices in no way indicate Israel's real intentions or a desire for peace on its part. Israel has already made its rejection of peace clear by refusing even to accept the modest request to extend the moratorium on settlement activity. Israel claims these days to be negotiating peace on the basis of the two-State solution, yet its settlement activities are on the verge of making that solution dead letter and without a chance of survival.

Peace is only as viable as the desire to make peace is translated into practical deeds. Political manoeuvring behind the smokescreen of paying mere lip service to peace only exacerbates an already tense situation and pushes it towards the precipice. We would stress once again that Syria's demands for peace are not the type of compromises that Israel claims to be making courageously and publicizing as painful. We are talking about usurped lands and rights that must be restored in full to their legitimate owners.

Syria and the Arab States have sought peace through the adoption of the Arab Peace Initiative, including the full restoration of usurped Arab rights, Israel's complete withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories to the line of 4 June 1967, the establishment of a Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital, and the settlement of the question of Palestinian refugees in accordance with the resolutions of international legitimacy.

However, Israel's answer to the Arab Peace Initiative has been its invasion of the West Bank, its 2002 massacres of Jenin and Nablus, its policy of continued expansion and settlement, and its appropriation of land and usurpation of natural resources and capabilities. Israel has not stopped at these cumulative, provocative excesses. It committed yet another act of aggression against Lebanon in the summer of 2006, followed by its aggression against Gaza in 2008, which killed thousands of Palestinian civilians and injured many, many more. Israel's crimes include the murder of humanitarian activists of various nationalities who tried to deliver humanitarian assistance to Gaza on the freedom flotilla.

Not satisfied with all this, Israel has continued to pursue settlement policies, build the racist separation wall, violate and desecrate holy shrines, lay siege to the defenceless Palestinian people of Gaza, and endorse decisions to Judaize the city of Jerusalem, the most recent of which was the decision to renovate certain parts of the old town. Moreover, Israel pursues its policy of collective punishment, the detention of thousands of Palestinian civilians and officials, and the abuse of detainees, including women, by Israeli soldiers.

The most recent of these racist Israeli decisions, adopted only a few days ago, concerns the requirement of non-Jews to pledge allegiance to the Jewish State. It is yet another expression of Israeli fascism, manifest in killings and racist laws that contradict twenty-first century calls for freedom and equality. They also contradict Israel's claim to be an oasis of democracy in the Middle East.

The Palestinian people still await international justice and expect us to come to their rescue. The question we must ask ourselves, however, is how long Israel will remain an entity above the law and accountable to none. How can we explain to the world the fact that the Security Council has chosen to remain silent vis-à-vis these crimes? Today more than ever before, the Council is called on to undertake practical and concrete measures, commensurate with Israel's

flagrant behaviour, to compel Israel to end its occupation of Arab territories. The international community must also strive to lift the deeply unjust siege of the Palestinian people of Gaza, open all the checkpoints, and reconstruct Gaza while providing international guarantees to prevent Israel from again destroying facilities and infrastructure there.

Israel continues to refuse to return the occupied Golan to its motherland, Syria, and to comply with the decisions of international legitimacy, particularly resolution 497 (1981). It pursues a policy of terror and oppression of the Syrian people of the Golan. It detains Syrian citizens of the Golan and continues to confiscate land in order to plant mines and expand settlements. We recall that Israeli mines in the occupied Syrian Golan injured 531 people, of whom 202, for the most part children, died and 329 were permanently disabled.

Israel continues to steal the water of the Golan. A few days ago, it drew water from the al-Ram dam in the occupied Syrian Golan, which led to a total loss of the reservoir's water and to the death of all fish there.

Here, we stress that Syria's sovereign right to the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967 is not subject to negotiation. Our full recovery of the Golan is the basis on which any steps to build peace should be founded. As President Bashar Al-Assad has said, it is clear that the Israeli Government is not concerned about peace. Its main concern has been security in a very narrow sense — their settler, expansionist and hostile security, which in their view can be achieved only at the expense of our rights and our security.

It is illogical and not even acceptable that we Arabs have to continue to provide proof and evidence that we are seriously interested in peace, despite our repeated declarations and statements to that end on various occasions, in particular since the convening of the 1991 Madrid Conference. The Israelis must prove that. The Israelis must express in deeds, not only in words, that they are ready for a just and comprehensive peace. They should seek to convince us Arabs that they are sincere about it, because they are the ones occupying our land. It is they who aggress our people and displace millions of them, not the other way around. They are the ones who undertake all such acts and, above all, they use protection and promises as a guise to blackmail us and to gain further concessions.

The Israeli Permanent Representative tried this morning to distract the Council's attention from focusing on the Israeli occupation of Arab land. He vehemently tried to make the Council consider any issue except the central issue of peace. Why? It is simple — because its failure to mention ending the occupation and achieving peace means that Israel is trying to shirk its responsibility for ending the occupation and achieving a just and comprehensive peace, including the establishment of the Palestinian State.

Israeli State terror, on the other hand, is known to all. It is documented by many international and Israeli institutions intent on trying to uncover Israeli violations of the human rights of Arabs in occupied Arab lands. There are reports of the carnage, crimes, occupation and aggression of Israeli State terror, which has continued for more than 60 years. Israel has mastered State terror. It has committed all sorts of crimes in Qana, Jenin, Nablus, Gaza, Bahr el-Baqar, Deir Yassin and al-Quneitra. The terror has even extended to United Nations representatives, such as Count Bernadotte. Israeli State terror has targeted United Nations Members and peace activists, including the ship *Rachel Corrie* and Turkish victims.

It also included the first air piracy case in history when Israel hijacked a Syrian civilian aircraft in 1954. I repeat that Israel hijacked a plane in 1954 and shot down a civilian Libyan jet in 1971. Recently, as representatives well know, Israel forged passports of some of its allies to assassinate Mahmoud Al-Mabhouh, a Palestinian citizen in Dubai.

The list goes on. We recall what has recently been disclosed by classified Israeli documents concerning the 1973 war. These documents show that, by the second day of the 1973 war, Israel had prepared a nuclear bomb, with which it planned to attack the city of Damascus. That is in an Israeli document. Israeli State terror is a threat to the world's peace and security, as was made clear at the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in New York in May, when it unanimously decided to name Israel as the main obstacle to the establishment of a nuclear weapon-free zone in the Middle East.

In conclusion, I wish to cite some excerpts from the Israeli press.

First, *Haaretz* has stated that high- or low-ranking Israeli leaders can expel any citizen from the occupied West Bank or any other Palestinian territory and that Israel may meet those who wish to extend their hand in peace and good-neighbourliness with more settlements and graves. *Israel Today* has written that if Israel really wants to pursue peace, it must stop following a policy of provocation and discrimination against the Israeli Arabs. *Maariv* has stated that Israel cannot conclude peace with Syria without giving up the Golan, but Israel is not prepared to do so. *Haaretz* has asked whether Israel's refusal even to discuss the Arab Peace Initiative meant that it must once again sacrifice thousands of soldiers, as it did in 1973, if it wishes to start genuine peace negotiations.

Maariv has written that no one objected to a rabbi publishing a book allowing a Jew to kill a non-Jew, and then asked why Israelis were astonished when mosques are quietly burned without any condemnation being raised. *Maariv* also has stated that Israelis have become a vindictive people who fail to see the misery of their neighbours, having been brainwashed and taught that the suffering of Arabs is not like their own, and that an Arab woman's mourning of her son's death is not as deep as a Jewish mother's grief.

Finally, *Yediot Ahronot* has stated that Israel is the only State that has occupied a people for 40 years, and yet it humiliates anyone who protests that fact. *Haaretz* has written that Israel's image had never been so low.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Shawabkah (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Council's meeting comes at a time when American efforts are intensifying and are coupled with an international undertaking to find an environment conducive to the success of direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Those negotiations are conducted with a view to reaching a two-State solution establishing an independent Palestinian State based on the lines of 4 June 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, to live in peace and security in a stable and secure region, side by side with all States and peoples of the region, including Israel.

Jordan supports those efforts and calls on Israel to respond to them so that direct negotiations can be resumed and lead to a positive outcome that addresses all final status issues, including Jerusalem, refugees, security and borders. The parties must demonstrate their seriousness by adhering to peace. That requires halting all unilateral Israeli measures in the occupied West Bank — at the heart of which is East Jerusalem — including construction inside settlements, forced evacuation and deportation, confiscation of land and property, and policies of demolition of Christian and Muslim Palestinian homes and eviction of their occupants. It also includes all forms of archaeological excavations and digging tunnels under and around holy Christian and Muslim sites.

Beyond their illegality and unlawfulness, such measures violate the rules of international law and international humanitarian law. With them Israel is blatantly flouting its obligations as the occupying Power while impeding United States and international efforts.

Jordan welcomes the statement by United States President Barack Obama during the General Assembly's general debate last month (see A/65/PV.11) on the importance of achieving a two-State solution and the strenuous efforts to bring about successful negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

The crux of the Arab-Israeli conflict is the question of Palestine; no solution to the conflict can be effected without settling it via a two-State solution. The achievement of that solution and of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East, in conformity with international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative, is of vital interest to, and enjoys the support of, the entire world, not merely the States and peoples of our region.

The Arab Peace Initiative, adopted in Beirut in 2002 and reaffirmed time and again at subsequent Arab summits, most recently at the Sirte summit in Libya this month, reveals the collective Arab and Islamic commitment to an equal, comprehensive, permanent and just peace. Unfortunately, that initiative has not received from successive Israeli Governments a response commensurate with its importance.

Here I would like to reiterate my country's view of the gravity and enormity of the consequences and dimensions of the absence of peace and stability in the Middle East. When His Majesty King Abdullah II Bin Al-Hussein always recalls the centrality of the Palestine question and emphasizes its priority and primacy over the other issues in the region, we proceed from the complete conviction that achieving a two-

State solution and a comprehensive peace is the only way to effectively and harmoniously resolve the other issues in the region, including manifestations of bigotry, extremism, terrorism and violence.

Jordan regrets the Israeli Government's decision not to extend the moratorium on settlement activities in the occupied areas. That threatens to derail the whole negotiating process, contrary to the wishes and demands of the entire international community — to whose will Israel pays no heed.

The President: I now give the floor to the His Excellency Mr. Pedro Serrano, head of the delegation of the European Union to the United Nations.

Mr. Serrano: The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia, and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia; and the EFTA country Liechtenstein, member of the European Economic Area; as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, align themselves with this declaration.

When we discussed the situation in the Middle East in July, the European Union and others expressed the hope that both parties to the conflict would very soon engage in direct, substantive discussions of all final status issues. That hope turned to reality when direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority started in Washington on 2 September, and later continued in Sharm el-Sheikh and Jerusalem. The European Union commended Israelis, Palestinians and the United States, as well as other Quartet and Arab partners, for bringing the start of those negotiations about.

Today we meet at a moment when efforts are being made to overcome the current deadlock in the negotiations — which began only a month ago.

There is no alternative to a negotiated two-State solution. The European Union calls on all parties to earnestly seek a satisfactory way to keep the negotiation process active and moving, and eventually to gather momentum. We welcome the decision of the Arab Peace Initiative Follow-up Committee to leave the door open on the continuation of negotiations.

In this context, the European Union deems it indispensable that both sides show restraint and refrain from actions that could negatively affect the continuation of the process. To that end, both sides must uphold and implement previous commitments and strive to create an environment conducive to a successful outcome of the negotiations. The European Union stresses the need for the Quartet to continue to play an essential role in the peace process.

The European Union recalls that settlements in occupied territory are illegal under international law, constitute an obstacle to peace and threaten to make a two-State solution impossible. We regret Israel's decision not to extend the moratorium instituted by its Government last November. The moratorium has had a positive impact. We reiterate our call on Israel to end all settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem.

If there is to be a genuine peace, a way must be found, through negotiations, to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two States. The European Union continues to call for a complete halt to all violence, in particular rocket fire and terrorist attacks.

When the European Union High Representative, Catherine Ashton, visited the region at the beginning of the month, she discussed with the Palestinian Authority the work it is doing to build institutions for statehood. The European Union takes note of the assessment by the World Bank, which stated that if the Palestinian Authority maintains its current performance, it is well positioned for establishment as a State at any point in the near future.

The European Union stresses the crucial importance of the continuation of the Palestinian state-building process — including the implementation of the Fayyad Plan — which the European Union will continue to support actively.

Political and financial support of the entire international community is essential. The European Union urges those who have made financial commitments to deliver on their promises. All efforts to achieve Palestinian reconciliation behind President Mahmoud Abbas must also be accelerated.

The European Union High Representative has visited Gaza twice this year and has praised the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East for its continuous efforts to provide health, education and social protection services. The European Union has welcomed Israeli steps to ease the entry of goods into

Gaza, but reiterates its calls for full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) and for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings to enable the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza, including goods from the West Bank. High Representative Ashton's discussions with the Palestinian Authority have also focused on how the donors can support exports, in order to allow the people of Gaza to gain a greater stake in their economy and their future.

The European Union calls for a solution that addresses Israel's legitimate security concerns, including a complete stop to all violence and arms smuggling into Gaza. The European Union has offered its assistance towards achieving this objective. The European Union also calls on those holding the abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit to release him without delay.

The European Union also recalls that peace in the Middle East should be comprehensive and reiterates the importance of negotiations on the Israeli-Syrian and Israeli-Lebanese tracks. As regards Lebanon, the European Union supports the Secretary-General's recent unequivocal statement reaffirming the independence of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. The European Union urges all parties not to interfere in the Tribunal's work and not to prejudge its outcome.

The European Union reaffirms its full support to the Lebanese authorities and commends the crucial role of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in southern Lebanon. It also calls upon all parties concerned to implement all provisions of resolution 1701 (2006), to respect the Blue Line in its entirety and to cooperate fully with the United Nations and UNIFIL.

These are the elements of the future — State-building, strong economic development, and security — and they need to be nurtured, but nurtured in the context of serious ongoing talks on all final status issues, which should lead to a two-State solution. The European Union reiterates its readiness to contribute substantially to the development of a comprehensive and sustainable solution, with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

The President: I shall now give the floor to the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Crowley (South Africa): South Africa welcomes this opportunity to again address the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. We also wish to congratulate you and your delegation, Mr. President, for effectively and efficiently steering the work of the Security Council during the month of October.

South Africa wishes to thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing delivered earlier to the Security Council. My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Egypt, who spoke on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

This debate is timely and takes place at a critical juncture in the latest round of stalled negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli parties. My delegation was hoping that we could address this meeting of the Security Council in the month of October on a more optimistic note, on a more hopeful note. My delegation was hoping that, at this point in time, some measure of progress would have been reached through direct negotiations, which would signal a forward-moving momentum that would place us firmly on the path of finding a sustainable and peaceful resolution of the outstanding permanent status issues and that would bring us closer to the realization of a two-State solution.

Our hope was based on some very positive and encouraging developments, including the efforts to resume negotiations between the parties through proximity talks, the continued engagement of the Quartet — and separately the United States of America — with the Palestinian and Israeli leadership, the resumption of direct talks between the parties on 2 September on all permanent status issues, and the continued support of the Arab League and Non-Aligned Movement, with the hope of seeing the direct talks achieve the ultimate objective of creating a two-State solution and ushering in a new era of Middle East peace and security. Those developments were significant and created an atmosphere at the international level conducive to moving the process forward and to ensuring that the Palestinians would realize their inalienable right of self-determination.

Throughout the period of negotiations, the resolve of the parties was severely tested through incidents such as the continued imposition of the inhuman blockade of the Gaza Strip, the continued construction of the

unlawful separation wall, and the violent assault by Israeli forces on the international humanitarian flotilla on 31 May 2010. Further threats to the negotiations stemmed from Israel's decision not to extend the settlement freeze when it expired on 26 September 2010.

In connection with the latter decision, my Government issued a statement in which it noted,

> "with serious concern that the partial moratorium imposed by the Israeli Government in November 2009 on the further construction of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian West Bank has not been renewed. The ten-month Israeli moratorium, which expired on 26 September 2010, was not renewed despite the resumption of direct negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian leaders...".

Furthermore, the halting of settlement construction is seen by the South African Government as a commitment already agreed to by the Israelis during prior negotiations, including at the International Middle East Peace Conference at Annapolis, which took place in November 2007 and in which South Africa participated.

My Government further stated that

> "the continued building of new settlements threatens to halt negotiations between Palestine and Israel, as Palestinian President Abbas has repeatedly made it clear that in the absence of a halt to settlement construction, he would not continue with the negotiations".

The South African Government further noted that

> "[t]he first few rounds of direct Israeli-Palestinian talks held during September 2010 appeared to have demonstrated a clear intention by both parties to effectively move the peace process forward. The South African Government accordingly calls on the Israeli Government to honour its previous international commitments by putting an end to all further settlement construction in the Palestinian West Bank indefinitely. In so doing it will demonstrate its serious intention to bring about the establishment of a viable and fully independent Palestinian State, existing side by side in peace with Israel within internationally recognized borders".

During our negotiations to establish a democratic South Africa, my country also experienced moments that threatened to derail the negotiations process and tested the resolve of our political leadership. Focused on the broader goal of peace, democracy and reconciliation, the South African political leadership defied all those who sought to have them fail in achieving those objectives.

This is such a moment in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations process, where the leadership of Palestine is confronted with circumstances that make it difficult for them to count on the good faith that is necessary for negotiations. My delegation has always stated that a long-term solution to the challenges facing the region can only be achieved through negotiations. For that to happen, it is essential that a climate of mutual trust and peace be created and that the Israeli political leadership take the difficult decisions needed to ensure sustainable peace in the region.

We therefore call on the Israeli Government to desist from all actions that could have a negative impact on the negotiations process. Israel's current acts threaten to undermine the legitimacy of the process by weakening the Palestinian Authority as an equal partner in the negotiations process. The Palestinian Authority has come to the talks in good faith, expecting the full implementation of Israel's previously agreed commitments under international law, as well as relevant Security Council resolutions and Israel's Road Map obligations.

My delegation also calls for continued unity among the Palestinian political leadership which, in our view, would strengthen the negotiations process.

South Africa urges the international community, this body and all players concerned to exert all the influence necessary and pressure Israel to meet its obligations under various Security Council resolutions and under international law. The Security Council in particular has to shoulder its responsibility for ending the Israeli occupation and ensuring that the Palestinian people's right to self-determination is met.

My delegation remains convinced that the only viable solution to the challenges confronting the region is a political solution based on the creation of a Palestinian State coexisting peacefully alongside Israel on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the implementation of resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002), 1515 (2003) and

1850 (2008), as well as the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Quartet Road Map.

Israel has an historic opportunity to move the peace process forward and to keep this flame of hope alive. If they do, they will ensure that the dream of a Palestinian State is brought a step closer and will bring within reach the realization of peace and security for themselves and for the region.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Kleib (Indonesia): Let me begin by extending the appreciation of my delegation to you, Mr. President, and to the members of the Council for convening this open debate on such an important issue. We also wish to thank Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing.

My delegation associates itself with the statement of the Non-Aligned Movement delivered earlier by the representative of Egypt, and the statement of the Organization of the Islamic Conference to delivered by the representative of Tajikistan.

This meeting of the Security Council has been convened at a time of great anxiety in the Middle East, following the convening last month of direct talks between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Regrettably, those talks are now in danger, as Israel did not extend the moratorium on settlement construction on the West Bank that expired on 26 September.

As one of the core issues, settlements remain the biggest obstacle to peace, as we have seen since the return to direct negotiations on 2 September. Israel's settlement policies and practices — which have been aimed at altering the demographic composition, physical character and status of Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem — are nothing but a blatant violation of international law. The transfer of civilians to occupied areas, whether or not in settlements that are under military control, is contrary to article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which clearly states that the occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.

Back in 1980 — 30 years ago — in paragraph 6 of resolution 465 (1980), the Security Council called on Israel "to dismantle the existing settlements and in particular to cease, on an urgent basis, the establishment, construction and planning of settlements in the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem".

We therefore believe that the Council could take a similar step by pronouncing itself collectively, and with a single voice, to urgently demand that Israel dismantle the existing settlements and cease the construction and planning of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. If Israel has a genuine commitment to peace, and not propaganda about peace, it must stop all settlement construction, expansion and planning in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and dismantle the settlements built there, in compliance with international law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

The conflict in the Middle East has indeed been going on for far too long. For 60 years, the illegal Israeli occupation has made the region a theatre of tension and violence. On the Palestinian part, the nation has been facing hardship and surviving without a State. The list of suffering of the Palestinian people caused by the Israeli action is long and continues to grow by the day, week and year.

There is no doubt that Israel's illegal occupation since 1967, its excessive and disproportionate use of force and its policy of collective punishment are crimes against all we stand for: the values of humanity and the values of respecting the sanctity of the Charter. That is a clear violation of international law and international humanitarian law.

For many years, Indonesia has joined the international community in drawing attention to the consequences of Israel's continued illegal activity in occupied Arab territories. We therefore support the current surge in diplomacy aimed at relaunching negotiations and jump-starting a comprehensive peace process, as illustrated by ongoing efforts, in particular by the United States. On its part, the Security Council must, and indeed can, exert a positive influence on the Middle East peace process. Not least, that would send a signal that the Council is once again shouldering its Charter-mandated responsibilities.

In response to a suggestion by President Abbas during his recent visit to Indonesia, we recently convened an informal ministerial consultative forum on Palestine here in New York, which was attended by Palestine, Indonesia, Brazil, India and South Africa.

All of them agreed to hold consultations on a regular basis and to assist the cause of Palestine in every forum possible. For the immediate future, we will calibrate our course of action in consultation with Palestine, depending on the direction the direct talks are taking.

There is perhaps no international issue more important to Indonesia, and closer to our hearts, than the effort to find a peaceful, just, lasting and comprehensive settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to bring to an end the illegal Israeli occupation that began in 1967. Therefore, the commitment of Indonesia to an independent, viable and democratic Palestine living side by side in peace and security with its neighbour is absolute.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Bouchaara (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would first of all like to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this public debate on the situation on the Middle East. We would also like to thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing on the most recent events in the region.

My delegation associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, as well as with those to be delivered by the representative of Mauritania on behalf of the Arab Group, and by the representative of Tajikistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. I should now like to make some additional comments in my national capacity.

The international community has followed with great interest and hope the positive signs that emerged in the month of September. Thanks to the flexibility demonstrated by the Palestinian side, with the support of Arab countries, as well as the efforts of the American Administration, direct Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations were relaunched in Washington, D.C., on 2 September, following 12 months of suspension. The resumption of negotiations, with the ultimate goal — as announced by President Barack Obama on 23 September in his speech in the General Assembly — is to reach an agreement that will bring in a new Member State into the United Nations, namely, a sovereign and independent Palestinian State living in peace with Israel.

However, that hope was quickly eclipsed by the persistence of the Israeli Government in its colonization policy after having refused to extend its moratorium. In addition, some days later, the international community learned of the decision by the Israeli Government, in spite of all the appeals made of it, to authorize tenders for the building of 238 housing units in the eastern part of the Holy City of Jerusalem. There is no doubt that this illegal decision is a serious development that could endanger the chances for renewing peace talks. As a response to those illegal measures, the Arab Peace Initiative Follow-up Committee, which met recently in Sirte, has confirmed the conviction of the Arab party that a return yet again to Israeli-Palestinian negotiations must be contingent on the total cessation of Israeli settlement in the occupied Palestinian territories, including Al-Quds.

My country, whose King, His Majesty Mohammed VI, is Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, wishes once again to express to the Council its deep concern about the decisions by Israeli authorities in the matter of the eastern part of Al-Quds, whereby it intends to modify the demographic composition of the Holy City and thereby undermine any possibility for success in establishing a viable Palestinian State. The persistence of such unilateral measures, which create an untenable situation, weakening those who work for peace and choose the path of dialogue to regain their legitimate rights, makes clear the policy of Israel towards the Arab population of the Holy City, especially the plan to raze 20 Palestinian homes in the Silwan neighbourhood.

It is worrisome to see that, even as they renew their commitment to achieve peace, Israeli authorities have continued throughout this past summer their policy of confiscating, seizing and expropriating lands for the construction of settlements, bypass roads and walls, thus leading to the expulsion of more that 600 Palestinians living in the eastern part of Al-Quds and the rest of the West Bank. Meanwhile, Israeli police continue to violate the compound of the Holy Al-Aqsa mosque. Given the central place of Jerusalem in the Middle East crisis, and what that city represents for all religions, we urge the international community, and especially the Security Council, to live up to their responsibilities and take action to put an end to these practices.

Today there is an international consensus about the need for a two-State solution and a comprehensive

peace in the Middle East, in accordance with the relevant decisions and the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted in 2002. The international community, in recognition of the gravity of the cessation of the peace talks, must take a stronger and more effective position so as to create the basic conditions necessary to relaunch genuine negotiations to preserve the fundamental common interests of the peoples of the region and thereby ensure an environment of peace, security and cooperation.

Our deep concern about the proliferation of obstacles to restarting direct talks nevertheless goes hand in hand with our firm and unalterable conviction that the peace process is an inevitable choice and that it will result in ensuring a just and comprehensive peace in the region, in the interest of all its peoples, guaranteeing their security and the recovery of their rights.

In that regard, the Kingdom of Morocco continues to follow with great interest the increased efforts of President Obama and the Quartet and all international efforts, especially those of the European Union. We hope that they will lead to a return to genuine and sincere talks based on the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map and past agreements and arrangements between the parties.

For its part, the Kingdom of Morocco will continue to work within the Arab Peace Initiative Committee to find through negotiation a lasting, comprehensive solution to all final status issues, especially that of Al-Quds — with the understanding that such a fair and comprehensive solution will only be possible if Israel withdraws from all Arab territories occupied since June 1967, including the Syrian Golan and the rest of occupied Lebanese territory, and if a viable Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital is created.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Republic of Tajikistan.

Mr. Aslov (Tajikistan) (*spoke in Russian*): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Group. First of all, I would like to thank you, Sir, for organizing this debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. I would also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for the very important briefing he has given us.

The stalemate in the Middle East process is very worrying, especially as it came as a result of Israel's attempts to dictate its own terms. The peace process cannot achieve genuine progress under the prevailing conditions. Israel should live up to its commitments and obligations, especially those stipulated by the agreements signed with the Palestinian side and enshrined in the Road Map.

It is self-evident that building Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, jeopardizes the peace process. It also sends signals about Israel's real intentions. Israel cannot pretend to make peace with the Palestinians and at the same time persist in stealing their lands for settlements. It is therefore the responsibility of the international community to compel Israel, the occupying Power, to refrain from actions that would undermine peace efforts. In order for the peace process to succeed, Israel should halt all settlement activities — including so-called natural growth — in all occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem. Also to be successful, the peace process should have a clear timeframe and clear implementation mechanisms.

The situation in East Jerusalem is a matter of great concern for the OIC and its member States. Israel's measures in occupied East Jerusalem are aimed at forcefully altering the historical character of the city. We consider Israel's decision to change the structure and shape of the centuries-old walls of the city an assault on its cultural heritage. Changing the demographic fabric of East Jerusalem through the expulsion of Palestinians from the city and expropriating their properties is a grave violation of international law.

The situation in Gaza is also very worrying. One and a half million Palestinians are living in harsh conditions as a result of the shameful, illegal and unjustified Israeli blockade. Israel must lift the blockade and allow the reconstruction of Gaza.

The OIC remains deeply concerned by Israel's ongoing air and land violations of Lebanon's sovereignty, in breach of resolution 1701 (2006). We call on Israel to withdraw fully from the remaining Lebanese occupied land in the Shebaa farm lands, the Kfar Shouba Hills and the northern part of Al-Ghajar village.

The OIC also joins the international community in reaffirming that all measures and actions taken, or to be taken, by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan and its institutional structure, as well as the Israeli measures to impose jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and have no legal effect. The OIC demands that Israel abide fully and immediately by resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, in implementation of resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

The OIC Group would also like to stress that peace in the Middle East can be achieved only by ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab land occupied since 1967, establishing an independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, and achieving a comprehensive and just solution for the plight of Palestinian refugees, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948.

The international community and the Security Council in particular have a legal and moral responsibility to take prompt and decisive actions to ensure the implementation of relevant resolutions based on international legitimacy and to meet the challenges we face in maintaining international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Mrs. Smith (Norway): A month ago, the international donor community met here in New York in the framework of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee to assess the progress made on building Palestinian institutions in the Palestinian territory. At that meeting, the World Bank reported to the donor community that the Palestinian Authority (PA) is now "well positioned for the establishment of a State at any point in the near future".

Over the past few years, the PA has made impressive efforts in building transparent and accountable institutions. Economic growth, combined with a steady decline in budget deficits, gives hope that the Palestinian economy is gradually moving towards financial sustainability. However, the World Bank report also stated clearly that this emerging State structure is not sustainable in its current form, but remains dependent on foreign aid.

Sixty per cent of the West Bank is still under full Israeli control. These areas are currently serving as military or environmental zones or are occupied by illegal settlements, and the PA cannot serve the Palestinian population in these areas properly either with regard to security or in ensuring proper infrastructure and utilizing the economic potential.

If the PA is to become independent of the support of the international donor community, it must be allowed to tap into the potential for economic growth that these areas hold. And the potential is substantial. Independent surveys suggest that the Jordan Valley could generate $1 billion-worth of industrial and agricultural output annually, and employ as many as 100,000 Palestinians.

East Jerusalem has traditionally been the engine of the Palestinian economy. Today, restrictions on the movement of goods and people have severed ties between the city and the rest of the West Bank, harming trade and economic growth. The continued expansion of Israeli settlements, exemplified by the recent decision to add another 240 units to settlements on occupied territory, only adds to the separation of East Jerusalem from the West Bank. The expansion of PA governance into these areas is necessary to secure economic growth and a sustainable Palestinian Authority.

At a time when direct talks have stalled over Israel's decision to continue the expansion of illegal settlements, it is worth recalling that the stakes are high. The Palestinian State structure is there and ready to assume statehood responsibilities. The donor community stands ready to carry its share of the burden in seeing the Palestinian State-building process finalized. In the international community, there is consensus that there is no alternative to the two-State solution and that detailed final-status negotiations over many years have dealt with many, if not most of the critical issues. Norway strongly supports all initiatives to bring credible negotiations back on track, and supports actions taken by the parties and the international community to underpin continued Palestinian State-building efforts.

The President: I give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. AlNafisee (Saudi Arabia): I should like to congratulate you, Sir, on your country's assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for a second

term. I should also like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his detailed briefing on the subject today.

At the outset, I should like to express my appreciation for the convening of this debate to address the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, at a time when the Middle East has a dire need to resume direct peace process negotiations and to prevent a stalemate situation as a result of the ongoing illegal Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly East Jerusalem.

In spite of all of the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to restart direct negotiations towards the establishment of a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, the Israelis continue to build these illegal settlements and bring more irrelevant questions to the negotiating table, such as the recognition of Israel as a Jewish State — a clear indication from the Israeli side that it is not seriously interested in reaching a just and peaceful solution, which is an internationally supported objective.

In light of the ongoing situation, my Government repeats its call on the international community to demand that Israel, the occupying Power, restart direct negotiations with the Palestinian Authority and halt all illegal settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territory, in particular East Jerusalem.

Two years have passed since Israeli occupation forces invaded the Gaza Strip and the Security Council adopted resolution 1860 (2009). Nonetheless, the widespread destruction of Gaza remains unabated, in spite of all assistance efforts. Israel's occupation forces continue to hinder the delivery of assistance by closing key crossings, increasing checkpoints, building a wall that now isolates Gaza from the rest of the world, pursuing a policy of collective punishment against the population of Gaza, and creating obstacles to the reconstruction process to heal the damage that Israeli war machine caused. All of these practices and others committed by the Israeli occupying forces clearly show the persistence of Israeli aggression towards the Palestinian problem.

Since Israel annexed East Jerusalem in 1967, a bitter transformation of the holy city has displaced the city's Arab population to create a Zionist East Jerusalem. Stripping Arab citizens of their identities and resettling them elsewhere is akin to ethnic cleansing. The situation in East Jerusalem deteriorates daily as Israel's policies demolish homes, destroy identities, displace people and alter records in order to rewrite history and change Jerusalem's demographics. In light of these illegal activities, the Kingdom reaffirms its condemnation of the continued resettlement of Arab Israeli citizens and calls for the immediate cessation and dismantling of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories.

We reiterate that the building of settlements is illegal under international law and constitutes an obstacle to peace negotiations. If Israel claims that it wants negotiations and is committed to peace, then it should first cease all settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories and dismantle existing settlements.

The Secretary-General confirmed in a recent statement the illegitimacy of settlement activity and called on Israel to fulfil its commitment, in accordance with the Road Map to peace, to freezing all new settlement, including so-called natural population growth, and dismantling all existing settlements built since March 2001.

The international community has demanded in concert the cessation of settlement activities on the basis of their illegitimacy. Will these demands be met with concrete action from our Security Council? Will the Council respond to the positions of concerned Member States by compelling Israel to stop new settlement activities and dismantle existing settlements?

Unfortunately, however, it is clear that things are not going in the right direction if we wish to reach the two-State solution, mainly due to Israel's insistence on continuing to build illegal settlements. Indeed, the Israeli Government announced last week the start of construction on 238 new housing units in East Jerusalem.

In Lebanon, the ongoing threat posed by Israel to the sovereignty of the people of that country further complicates an already complex situation.

Finally, Israel is ignoring or disregarding the call of the international community to start negotiations in good faith on the return of the occupied Golan to its legitimate owner, Syria.

The Government of my country hopes that the wish expressed by President Barack Obama at the opening of the sixty-fifth session of the General

Assembly, that the Palestinians will take their seat as a full member in next year's session of the General Assembly, will come true. We hope that Israel will avail itself of the opportunity of direct negotiations to respond, howsoever late, to the Arab Peace Initiative and prove that it is a real partner capable of making peace by participating in the two-State solution in order to end six decades of bloodshed, conflict and continuous threats to international peace and security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your successful presidency of the Security Council this month. I thank you for convening this meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. I would also like to thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing on behalf of the Secretariat. I align myself with the statement delivered by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the statements to be delivered by the representative of Mauritania on behalf of the Arab Group and the representative of Tajikistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

This year has seen a serious move forward by the Quartet and the States sponsors of the peace process. The efforts of the United States resulted in the conduct of indirect negotiations and the launch of direct negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides. Arab countries have shown a serious desire for peace and created a climate conducive to stimulating the peace negotiations, but that will not continue indefinitely.

On behalf of the Arab States, in September 2009 the State of Qatar addressed a letter to the United States mediator seeking guarantees that Israel would go along with the Arab position. Now, more than a year later, the world has seen the radical positions of the Israeli Government, which evades its internationally agreed obligations and recently brought the negotiations to a deadlock.

The Israeli Government persists in its policy of illegal settlement in the occupied Palestinian territories and the occupied Syrian Golan, in defiance of the demands of the Arab Peace Initiative ministerial follow-up committee in its statements. The latest such statement was issued at the end of the meeting held on 8 October in the city of Sirte, Libya, under the chairmanship of the State of Qatar, before the special summit.

There is an international consensus that the Palestinian issue will be resolved when there are two States living side by side in peace. However, Israel's expansion of settlements, particularly around East Jerusalem, undermines the chances of achieving a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders, and threatens the contiguity of the Palestinian territory as one of the basic components of statehood.

The Israeli Government seeks to justify the expansion of settlement activity by pointing to so-called natural growth. This concept is completely unacceptable because the settlements are neither legal nor the product of natural growth. The Israeli policy encourages settlement in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly East Jerusalem, by providing Government subsidies and incentives to encourage the transfer of its civilian population to Palestinian territory, in contravention of international law.

In addition, the international community should not be deceived by the so-called temporary freeze on settlement construction. It is necessary instead to stop settlement activity and dismantle all settlements established in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, in conformity with relevant United Nations resolutions. A lasting, just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East can be based only on the principle of land for peace, the terms of reference of relevant Security Council and General Assembly decisions, and the Arab Peace Initiative, which will have to be reconsidered following a loss of confidence in Israel's intentions.

We emphasize that it is essential to engage all segments of the Palestinian population towards the success of peace efforts, and that our Palestinian brothers ought to do everything in their power to foster national unity in the interests of the Palestinian people and to guarantee the geographical and political unity of the Palestinian territory. However, it is wrong to think that the current crisis in the Palestinian national dialogue is a Palestinian issue alone, since the parties that called for the rejection of the results of the 2006 democratic elections caused a split in Palestinian ranks, thus easing pressure on Israel, the occupying Power.

It is equally important to provide protection from Israeli criminal acts, which are imprescriptible and

may require those liable to provide compensation under international law. It is high time to take action to ensure that such acts do not recur, particularly as they are catalysts of international terrorism. Furthermore, many of these acts are considered to be acts of international terrorism and have not been forgotten by the international community.

There is no need to describe these acts in detail, as there have been so many such Israeli attacks on many Arab countries, not to mention instances of murder through espionage and maritime piracy, the division of occupied territory and all-out military aggression with internationally prohibited weapons.

It is of critical importance to break the illegal and inhumane siege imposed on the people of Gaza as a whole. Worse yet, Israel impedes the efforts of the United Nations and others to rebuild what was devastated by the Israeli military assault on the Gaza Strip. Is this civilized behaviour?

We reiterate our firm rejection of the illegal measures taken by Israel in occupied East Jerusalem and its attempts to change the Arab identity, demographic composition, legal status and religious character of the city. We stress that all these attempts are null and void and without legal effect. The international community must reject the attempts of the Israeli Government to desecrate Islamic and Christian holy sites, demolish houses in the city, expel its Arab residents and withdraw their identities with the aim of Judaizing the city. Such attempts violate the obligations of Israel, the occupying Power, under international law, are in contravention of the relevant United Nations resolutions, and undermine the foundations of a peaceful solution of the Palestinian issue and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

While the Israeli occupation of Lebanese territory continues, we must point out the ongoing Israeli violations of Lebanese sovereignty and of resolution 1701 (2006), which are summarized in the letters that have been circulated by the Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations. Those violations, which are acts of provocation and arrogance, must end if the Israeli Government does not seek to destabilize the region, as it claims.

Moreover, Israel continues to occupy the Syrian Golan Heights and to deplete its wealth. We reaffirm here the decisions of the General Assembly declaring the Israeli decision to annex the Golan invalid and call for its return to Syria, the implementation of Security Council resolution 497 (1981), and the return of the remaining occupied Lebanese territories to Lebanon.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Haroon (Pakistan): May I extend to you, Sir, my congratulations to Uganda for the successful handling of the work of the Security Council this month. We would also like to associate ourselves with statements made by the representatives of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Alignment Movement and Tajikistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. May I also associate myself with the statements made by my colleagues, the representatives of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and with statement to be made by the representative of Tunisia. I am sure we speak with one voice.

The resumption of the Israel-Palestine direct negotiations last month had rekindled hope for all of us for sustainable peace in the Middle East and a permanent political settlement of the Israel-Palestinian question. But I fear that our hopes and optimism appear to be short-lived, as the window of opportunity for meaningful and sustained negotiation is once again closing.

We need to extend our hands and grasp this fleeting moment of history, because we believe that the Security Council, the Middle East Quartet and the international community must act together in tandem to prevent the collapse of the talks. Today's open debate can effectively communicate a collective message, if we focus ourselves on three key areas so that the talks will now move in the right direction. The first one is the unconditional cessation of all settlement activity by Israel.

The international community must play a role in this. They must sensitize Israel to get it to announce its unconditional cessation of all settlement activity. Settlement activity violates international law, vitiates the atmosphere of the talks and mutes the voice of peace and compassion. It amounts to a colonization procedure of the Palestinian territory.

Settlement activity in recent times has shown numerous patterns. The more worrying trend is in and around East Jerusalem, where the status of the centuries-old prayer places, mosques, churches and cemeteries of the Palestinian people are being altered

in the name of excavation and the creation of new housing space. Violence by settlers against their Palestinian neighbours has become a routine, albeit regrettable corollary of that activity.

We note with particular concern the announcement made this past Friday by the Israeli authorities of their intent to build 238 housing units in East Jerusalem's neighbourhoods of Ramot and Pisgat Ze'ev. Israel must stop this illegal activity. It must also end its calculated ambiguity on settlements in the West Bank, with a categorical renunciation of any new project. At the moment, we are allowing settlement activity to derail the negotiations or cast its threatening challenge as a shadow upon the peace process of the world.

Secondly, improvement in the lives of the Palestinian people is very important. This will indicate whether we are proceeding towards peace. The negotiation process must run in parallel with this. A myriad of checkpoints, roadblocks, military siege and separation walls cannot indicate peace and progress. This has infested the land of the prophets and the holy books and it must end. This must stop.

We acknowledge a set of measures taken by the Israeli authorities — and this is important — to ease restrictions on movement in the West Bank and to improve Gaza access. Such measures must be sustained by a deeper political commitment to improve livelihoods in Palestine through respect of human rights, freedom of movement and unrestricted flow of commerce. It cannot simply be a tap that can be turned on or off.

Thirdly, in order to believe that efforts are on the right track, there must be upgraded assistance to the Palestinian Authority. We must recognize this, especially regarding the plans announced in August 2009 for building the institutions of a Palestine State within two years. But we have continued to allow the denigration of the Palestinian Administration and economy. Many independent studies, including the Economic Monitoring Report prepared by the World Bank, have praised the performance of the Palestinian Authority in institution-building and delivery of public services. This has not found much voice in this particular forum and it needs to be said.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have projected an 8 per cent growth rate in the West Bank and Gaza. This is very creditable. This economic boom and entrepreneurship can be a solid edifice for the Palestinian statehood and for its people. And in fact, it can rebut violence. This holds immense promise for a lasting peace in the region and beyond. The economic and political momentum behind this significant change must not be lost. A strong and confident Palestine can better deliver peace, both at the negotiating table and in the streets of the region.

For lasting peace in the wider Middle East, we would also urge parallel progress on the Israel-Lebanon and Israel-Syria tracks, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. We must encourage those negotiations to systematically move forward, along with all that we are doing here. Pakistan has always been supportive of lasting peace for all inhabitants of the Middle East — I repeat, for all of the inhabitants of the Middle East — irrespective of religion, ethnicity and nationality.

We continue to look forward to substantive and objective investigations by the Secretary-General's Panel of Inquiry on the freedom flotilla incident of 31 May 2010. We await a date for its publication. The freedom flotilla had embarked on a noble mission, and those killed aboard certainly deserve our attention. The Panel must diligently pursue the matter and bring it before this Chamber in a timely fashion, within the year. Justice must prevail and those affected must be compensated.

We share the common goal of the international community to achieve an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side and in peace with its neighbours. Our prayer today is that this open debate of the Council will bring us nearer to this peaceful objective.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Jomaa (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank His Excellency Ambassador Rugunda. I would also like to congratulate his country, which is presiding over the Security Council this month, and him for the excellent way in which he has conducted the work and deliberations of the Council.

My delegation subscribes to the statements made by the representatives of Egypt on behalf of the

Non-Aligned Movement, and of Tajikistan on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The international community has placed a good deal of hope on the resumption of direct negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians, which were launched in September under United States auspices. Many countries, including my own, and various international and regional organizations have expressed their support for these negotiations, aimed at reviving the peace process in the Middle East and at achieving a solution to the issue of Palestine on the basis of the well-known international terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We had hoped that we would meet today at a time when negotiations were still ongoing. We encourage the parties involved to continue to make all necessary efforts to achieve the goals of resolving all pending critical issues and ending a long-standing conflict. Regrettably, these negotiations have been interrupted by Israel's refusal to extend the moratorium on settlements and its decision to resume settlement activity. Worse yet, the Israeli authorities have renewed their colonial activities at a time when the region needs dialogue and negotiations more than ever in order to achieve a global, lasting and just peace, which is in everyone's interest.

Arab leaders met at an extraordinary Arab summit conference in Sirte, Libya, on 9 October. The Palestinian question was at the top of the Arab leaders' concerns, especially in light of recent events. President Ben Ali of Tunisia made a statement at the summit in which he reiterated the steadfast support of Tunisia to the brotherly Palestinian people with a view to ensuring that they recover their legitimate rights over their historic homeland, especially the right to establish their own State on their national soil.

President Ben Ali called on the international stakeholders, the parties to the conflict and the Quartet to exert more pressure on Israel to end its policy of settlement-building, the Judaization of Jerusalem and its rejection of international legitimacy. The President also called on the international community to pursue its efforts to renew direct negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli Government in order to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the region.

The situation on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territories has given rise to concern. The settlement policy pursued by Israel tends to undermine the Arab and Islamic character and identity of the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif. It also causes additional suffering to the brotherly Palestinian people, who have been deprived of their basic legitimate rights, including their right to create their independent State on their own national soil.

The situation requires all parties to take a firm stand and commit themselves to the principle of peace. Tunisia is strongly committed to the principles of international law, supports peace, and calls for a renewal of dialogue and negotiations to that end. However, Tunisia appeals to the parties to avoid deadlock and tensions that would only increase the threats to security and stability in the region and could undermine the prospects for peace to which our nations aspire.

As we discuss the situation in the Middle East today, I would like to reiterate my country's call for an end to the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan and the remaining occupied Lebanese territories, in accordance with international law, so that all nations can enjoy peace and security and devote themselves to reconstruction and development and work for a better future.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Khazaee (Iran): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on Uganda's successful presidency of the Security Council this month and to thank you for convening this important meeting.

The Middle East is at the crossroads of the main divine religions of the world. It inspires a vast source of spiritual and philosophical perfectionism. Its divine spirit demands that it be a land of peace, justice and compassion, and not one of conflicts and human suffering.

It was in this spirit that the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mr. Ahmadinejad, embarked on a State visit last week to Lebanon and was warmly welcomed by the people and the Government of Lebanon in an almost unprecedented manner. This warm reception of the President is indicative of the constructive role that the Islamic Republic of Iran plays in the region in general, and in Lebanon in particular. This fact has been confirmed by Lebanese

officials and all influential political figures and groups who are qualified to judge the positive effects of the visit, unlike those who look at this important and constructive regional event as an impediment to their wrong expansionist political agendas in the region.

It is therefore necessary for the international community, in particular the Security Council, and the Secretary-General to take into account the important and powerful role that the Islamic Republic of Iran plays in the region and to take advantage of it to maintain and consolidate peace and stability in Lebanon and the region as a whole.

If the Middle East is to see the prosperity and dignity it so deserves, the miserable plight and sufferings of the Palestinian people must end. We must not let the peace and stability of the region be constantly threatened by a regime that has a dark history of crimes and aggression. Clearly, more and more Palestinians see little justification in pursuing unequal peace with an unequal partner. The present Zionist regime of blockades, separation walls and checkpoints has led to the imprisonment of the entire Palestinian population in Gaza and the West Bank.

As has been stated again and again, the Palestinian issue is the core problem of the Middle East. It is this conflict which has, over the past six decades, spawned the ever-widening circle of Israel's confrontations with its neighbours and the Islamic world. It is this conflict which has contributed most significantly to the anger and frustration of the people of the Islamic world.

The consequences of our collective failure to bring peace, justice and compassion to the Middle East are disastrous for the region and beyond. What adds to the pessimism is the continuing grave situation on the ground in terms of the humanitarian plight of the Palestinians, in particular the people besieged in Gaza. Amidst this human tragedy, the ongoing provocative and aggressive actions of the Israel regime in the occupied territories have compounded the plight of the Palestinian people and made a just solution to the conflict all the more difficult.

An immediate end to the illegal practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people is the most important prerequisite for building an environment of trust and confidence. Trust and confidence, together with the active engagement of the international community, are the only way forward to peace.

In this context, there is an urgent need to address the Israeli nuclear weapons programme. Nuclear weapons in the hands of a regime with an unparalleled record of State terrorism and resort to aggression and to the threat or use of force against other countries presents a real threat to regional and global peace and security and the non-proliferation regime. This fact was underlined at the third Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in New York in April. This threat needs to be urgently and decisively addressed by the international community, and initiative for the creation of a zone free from weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East should be actively pursued.

In accordance with its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Security Council has a significant and crucial role to play in supporting efforts to restore peace and justice in the Middle East by ending the suffering of the Palestinians and by putting an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, Lebanese territories and the Golan Heights. These are essential measures that need to be taken in order to bring lasting stability to the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Kohona (Sri Lanka): My delegation is pleased to have this opportunity to address this Council on this important issue at a crucial time for the Middle East peace process. I also wish to extend our sincere congratulations to Uganda on its assumption of the presidency of the Council and for the work done by the Ugandan delegation. We express our appreciation to you, Sir, for convening this debate.

I thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, for his informative briefing on the situation in the Middle East. We associate ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The resumption of direct talks between the two leaders of Israel and Palestine on 2 September in Washington, D.C., with the facilitation of President Obama, indeed brought new hope to many who sincerely await a comprehensive resolution of the

question of Palestine in order to achieve sustainable peace in the Middle East. However, unfortunately, the stalemate continues despite the relentless efforts of many, including regional leaders, thus prolonging the plight of millions of innocent Palestinian civilians who have waited far too long for justice and their inalienable rights. Peace in the Middle East would be a major contribution to world peace.

We strongly believe that the ending of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory and settlement activities remains central to finding a viable and just solution to the question of Palestine. Forty-three years of immeasurable hardship and disruption of normal civilian life would be a disturbing situation in any circumstance. We earnestly hope that the resolutions adopted by this body and the General Assembly will be respected and implemented without delay.

Hatred and violence only beget hatred and violence. Therefore, the consistent call by many concerned on all parties to the conflict to stop violence and exercise restraint needs to be heeded. It is the only way forward to ensure an environment conducive to lasting peace in the region. It is the most pragmatic way to build confidence and ease the suffering of the Palestinian people.

Once more, Sri Lanka renews its call on both Israel and Palestine to exploit all avenues in their quest for a lasting solution in which both sides could live side by side as neighbours within secure and recognized borders and bring Israel greater acceptance, both within the region and beyond.

We reiterate our support for the Government of President Abbas and commend the decision of the League of Arab States to keep the doors open for peace talks, despite the present deadlock. The Arab League has demonstrated moral leadership and political maturity with this decision. We believe that Palestinian unity should be restored through peaceful means for the sake of a strong and stable Palestine State. It is important that the national and democratic institutions of the Palestinian Authority be protected and maintained, as they will form the bedrock of a future Palestinian State, independent and self-sustaining.

It is therefore the earnest desire and hope of the Government of Sri Lanka that both Palestine and Israel, together with the major stakeholders of the Middle East peace process, will overcome the current impasse in their negotiations, and do so without delay.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nicaragua.

Mrs. Rubiales de Chamorro (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me to thank you, Sir, for having convened this open debate under your presidency on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement. I also thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, for his briefing.

We have observed and closely followed the negotiations launched on 2 September. We did not have to wait long before seeing once again which party would continue to create obstacles to peace in the Middle East. The occupying Power was quick to announce its intention to hold a referendum clearly aimed at creating conditions surrounding any outcome and at violating the Palestinians' right of return. In addition, Israel made the illegal and provocative decision to continue to build housing units in East Jerusalem. The Israeli expansionist policy also continues to include the demolition of Palestinian homes. More serious still is the policy of violence and xenophobia preached by the Israeli Government, inciting its citizens to violence with the aim of compelling the Palestinian Arab population to leave the lands that are rightly theirs.

Nicaragua once again reiterates its condemnation of the criminal blockade on the Gaza Strip and demands that Israel meet its international obligations under international law, in particular international humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions. Israel continues to collectively punish more than 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza, who live in that jail of 360 square kilometres under an air, sea and land blockade.

After having murdered nine Turkish activists aboard a humanitarian flotilla, the decision that Israel took in June 2010 to reduce restrictions and allow the entry of food and household goods was seen by some as a good start. However, in the light of events, that act was nothing more than a cosmetic touch-up of the genocidal blockade and an attempt to divert public attention from the situation.

The true aim behind the blockade is to keep the people supposedly alive, but in reality keeping them always on the brink of annihilation. The blockade also cuts off a people's right to sustainable development.

Proof of that, to give just two examples, is that since the start of the blockade, half of the agricultural land has become inaccessible and lies fallow. Also, most of Gaza's manufacturing facilities have closed their doors, with unemployment estimated at 40 per cent.

Returning to the attack on the humanitarian flotilla, with its characteristic impunity, Israel has refused an international investigation and has qualified the murder of those people as self-defence. Can the illegal boarding of a humanitarian flotilla in international waters be considered legitimate defence? It not being enough to attack the humanitarian flotilla in international waters, Israeli soldiers displayed the most brutal violence and were not satisfied with neutralizing their victims, but riddled them with bullets.

Likewise, Nicaragua condemns the continued violations of Lebanon's sovereignty in open violation of the Council's resolutions, as well as all measures and actions undertaken against the occupied Syrian Golan, which must be returned immediately by the occupying Power.

Nicaragua calls on all countries that have not done so to recognize the State of Palestine, but in particular on the Council's permanent members and those other States involved in the peace process, which have the greatest responsibility in that regard.

The General Assembly and the Council should take concrete steps to fully recognize the Palestinian State and its entry into this Organization as a full-fledged Member. It is simply shameful that the international community continues to favour the strong over the weak and the occupier over the occupied. It is unacceptable for the Organization to recognize a State that resorts to violence as a national policy and not recognize the Palestinian State, whose people have sought for more than 60 years peace and freedom to give their citizens a dignified life.

We must ask ourselves if Israel and its main ally will really take the decision this time to bring about, through dialogue and negotiation, the creation of a Palestinian State within the 1967 borders or if, respectively, they will continue to be victimizers and accomplices to a genocide that has already lasted more than six decades.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Iceland.

Mr. Pálsson (Iceland): The resumption of direct peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority earlier this autumn was a long-awaited event, raising hopes around the world that the parties might finally make progress on the final status issues.

Now, after a very short interval, there is a serious risk that the peace process might stall once again. Israel must assume the greatest part of the responsibility for that, having refused to renew its moratorium on settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

It is important to recall that the settlements are not simply a distraction or an obstacle to peace. They are illegal under international law, a product of the occupation and designed to further entrench the occupation. To call on Israel to immediately cease all settlement activity is therefore a legitimate request and, indeed, the international community's obligation.

Iceland remains deeply sympathetic towards the plight of Palestinians, now in the public eye due to the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza and the raid on the flotilla in international waters earlier this year. The raid was condemned by my Government and drew strong public reaction. Experts, mandated by the Human Rights Council, have now concluded that Israel violated international law by attacking the flotilla. We urge the Israeli authorities to work with the United Nations on the follow-up to the report (A/HRC/15/21).

Israel and the Palestinian side should also conduct independent and credible investigations, meeting international standards, into the serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law reported by the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict (A/HRC/12/48).

The Government of Iceland strongly believes that the blockade of Gaza is contrary to international human rights and humanitarian law, inflicting collective punishment on the Gaza population. Accordingly, the Government of Iceland calls upon the Government of Israel to bring the blockade to an end and to ensure that the overall needs of the population are met.

Finally, Iceland firmly supports a peaceful resolution to the conflict and the two-State solution. A sustainable and just peace will not be achieved in the Middle East without the realization of the two-State

solution, with Israel and Palestine living side by side in security.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Venezuela.

Mr. Valero Briceño (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We would like to congratulate you, Sir, for the work that you undertaking as President of the Security Council. We wish you success in your efforts.

We come here to reiterate our fervent desire for the prompt establishment of the Palestinian State and for peace in the Middle East. We associate ourselves with the statement made today on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the efforts of the League of Arab States in support of the Palestinian people's self-determination.

The Government of Israel has violated the United Nations Charter on many occasions. The Permanent Observer of Palestine has sent 374 letters to the Secretary-General and the Security Council that relate the excesses committed against the Palestinian people by the occupying Power, Israel. Numerous reports by United Nations rapporteurs also confirm the outrages committed by the State of Israel. Thus there exists a comprehensive criminal record of its assaults that has moved and outraged the conscience of the world. Venezuela demands that the Security Council take charge in this matter and proceed without delay to apply the measures outlined in the United Nations Charter in order that the State of Israel complies with international law.

Illegal settlements and the practice of occupation, condemned by the Governments and peoples of the world, are part of the State of Israel's policy of aggression, which is aimed at perpetuating its occupation and depriving the Palestinian people of their inalienable right to self-determination and sovereignty. The occupying Power is carrying out an ethnic war and a racist and xenophobic policy aimed at the de-Arabization of Palestine.

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, in accordance with the views expressed by the Arab League, believes that the revival of Israeli colonization through the building of settlements on Palestinian land is a sabotage of the negotiation process being conducted by the Palestinian National Authority and the Israeli Government. The continued construction of these settlements, which has been condemned around the world, affects the borders of a Palestinian State.

The Israeli Government has again shown that it does not have the political will to move forward with direct negotiations with the Palestinian National Authority. The United Nations should demand that the State of Israel refrain from further violating the norms of international law and from disrupting the negotiations currently being conducted.

Before the eyes of the world, the Government of Israel has amassed a voluminous record of violations of international law. Why does the Security Council permit the impunity of this occupying Power? We therefore request that the Security Council exercise the powers invested in it by the Charter of the United Nations to maintain and preserve international peace and security.

The Charter states in its preamble that it is necessary to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, to reaffirm the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small and to respect obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela considers that the Security Council, by allowing the impunity of the State of Israel, has not complied with its obligations under the Charter. This body, unfortunately, is a prisoner of the right of the veto. That is why Venezuela has stressed the need to rebuild the United Nations. Among other things, that means eliminating the right of the veto in the Security Council and granting binding force to the decisions of the General Assembly, including those having to do with international peace and security.

In conclusion, I note that the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela has been admitted as a full member of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. From that platform, or any other, we will support the struggles of this people, which seek to achieve their historical claims.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bolivia.

Mr. Solón (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): First of all, the Plurinational State of Bolivia would like to associate itself with the statement delivered on behalf of the countries of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Plurinational State of Bolivia condemns Israel's continuing military occupation of Palestinian territory, perpetrated through systematic violations of international law and United Nations resolutions. In that regard, we call on the international community to show solidarity with the Palestinian people in the tragedy they are experiencing. With courage and dignity, they are continuing to cope with persecution, closed areas, shortages of food and drinking water and edicts by Israel that violate human rights and the Geneva Conventions. Israel is also continuing to impose widespread displacements that affect thousands of Palestinian families.

Since the last open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question (see S/PV.6363), the international community has continued to make various efforts to put a stop to violence, terrorism and the loss of innocent Palestinian lives in the region. Nevertheless, we continue to witness the perverse consequences of the occupation by a foreign Power. The serious economic effects of that occupation have deprived the Palestinian State and its inhabitants of their legitimate right to exist.

Along with the blockade and war in the Gaza Strip, we also cannot remain indifferent to the alarming direct and indirect costs of Israeli's closure policy in the West Bank. According to a report (TD/B/57/4) by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), that has led to a loss of $3.1 billion over the past three years. The same UNCTAD report highlights the fact that in 2009 the trade deficit with Israel reached $2.6 billion. That figure exceeds the value of all the assistance that the donor community provides to Palestine.

These and other serious constraints in Gaza and many areas of the West Bank, which serve to increase disparities and fragmentation in the occupied Palestinian territories, only highlight the unjust practices of the occupying Power, Israel.

The Plurinational State of Bolivia would like to express its strong solidarity with the pain of the Palestinian people. We vehemently reject Israel's unnecessary destruction of thousands of Palestinian homes, businesses and vital civilian infrastructure, including water and sanitation facilities that are essential for ensuring the fundamental right to water and sanitation, which has been recognized by the General Assembly as a human right.

We condemn Israel's use of access to water as a way to evict the Palestinian population from its territories. The Plurinational State of Bolivia urges Israel to end all its illegal settlement activities. We demand that Israel halt its illegal practices against the Palestinian people, put a definitive end to its illegal blockade of Gaza and immediately allow the permanent opening of all crossing points for the movement of people and goods into and out of the territory, which is necessary to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and allow for immediate reconstruction and the economic recovery of the Palestinian people.

The international community has a responsibility to ensure that the most reliable possible investigation is carried out on all the violations and crimes committed by Israel in the Gaza Strip. It is in precisely this important framework that the Committee of Independent Experts appointed in accordance with the Human Rights Council resolution of March of this year on the follow-up to the Goldstone Report can pursue its work.

The negotiations that need to take place in the framework of the peace process are often disrupted by illegal settlement activity, which is obviously aimed at the illegal acquisition and de facto annexation of more Palestinian territory, thereby imposing a unilateral solution, which has clearly been shown in the last few days by Israel by refusing to extend a moratorium settlement.

Bolivia considers that the conduct of the peace process between the parties should be based on the fulfilment of agreements and the cessation of settlements in occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, which is essential to establishing an atmosphere of trust in the region.

In this context, the Plurinational State of Bolivia would like to make an appeal for the international community to take urgent measures to make sure that Israel as an occupying Power comply with all of its obligations under international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and United Nations resolutions, as well as the advisory opinion and its obligations under the Road Map.

Bolivia would like to place its hope in the continued international efforts of the international community to fulfil the just aspirations of the

Palestinian people for whom we would like to resolutely express our support and solidarity.

The President: I shall now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Momen (Bangladesh): Mr. President, let me begin by thanking you for chairing this very important open debate on the situation in the Middle East. I also would like to convey our appreciation to Assistant Secretary-General, Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, for his insightful and comprehensive briefing this morning.

I also wish to state that the delegation of Bangladesh aligns itself with the statements delivered by the representatives of Egypt and Tajikistan on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, respectively. In addition, I wish to briefly make certain points that Bangladesh believes to be of importance.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, has always been a major concern for the international community and the United Nations. A durable and sustainable resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the issue of Palestine, which is the core of the long-lasting crisis, must therefore be our collective strategic objective. All Member States should pledge complete commitment to this objective and throw their full moral, diplomatic, political and economic support behind its early realization. Bangladesh is always ready to play a constructive role in this collective endeavour to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on the two-State principle. Bangladesh joins with the international community in reaffirming its full support for the Palestinian people in its just and legitimate struggle for self-determination and freedom from continued occupation.

The people of Palestine are being denied their fundamental rights to self-determination and to live freely in their own land. Displaced Palestinians have been denied their right to return home and live in dignity and safety. Unfortunately, it appears to have been a collective failure on the part of the international community and, even more so, of the people of Israel, who despite having endured deprivation and sufferings has failed to rise to the occasion and guarantee the people of Palestine its fundamental rights to self-determination and a sovereign State of its own side by side with Israel.

In order to achieve a lasting solution in the Middle East, it is very important to address the key issue, which is the prolonged and illegal occupation of the Arab territories by Israel. The solution requires Israel's complete and unconditional withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and all other occupied Arab lands.

We are nevertheless heartened to see a new beginning in the peace process. It is encouraging that President Mahmoud Abbas met with the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, last month and started direct talks, which had remained stalled since 2008. Let us hope that their meeting is a step in the right direction towards the two-State solution. Let us hope that they will adopt a mindset conducive to lasting peace and that Israel will stop its illegal eviction of Palestinian residents and end its settlement projects as steps towards the realization of the two-State solution.

The international community is eagerly waiting for a breakthrough. Can we be optimistic that this modest beginning of direct talks will end up in consolidating the peace process? My delegation believes that direct negotiations will only be successful if there is sustained regional and international support for the talks, the parallel process of Palestinian State-building and the pursuit of a just, lasting and comprehensive regional peace, as envisaged in the Fourth Geneva Convention, the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), and 425 (1978), the principle of land for peace, and the Madrid terms of reference, which provide for Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Arab and Palestinian territories back to the 4 June 1967 line, the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative, which are the best guides for achieving a two-State solution and for guaranteeing Israel's security and stability.

The two sides should, as soon as possible, settle the core issues including the status of Jerusalem and the return of the Palestinian refugees. Let me urge the international community, especially the Quartet, to ease the financial burden of the Palestinian Authority. There should be renewed commitments to increase financial assistance to the Palestinian people.

In conclusion, let me reiterate Bangladesh's long-standing position that the continued illegal occupation of Palestine over the past six decades is the root cause of the violence, unrest and destabilization in the

region. Let me also reiterate our full support for a lasting peace for all inhabitants of the region, both Arabs and Israelis, and our strong commitment to the realization of an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, living side by side and in peace with all its neighbours, including Israel.

The President: I shall give the floor to the representative of Costa Rica.

Mr. Weisleder (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): The situation in the Middle East and the conflict between Israel and Palestine are matters that have burdened the United Nations and the Security Council for more than six decades now. For those who have followed the events, and particularly the discussions in the Organization, our attention is drawn to the repetition of statements and denunciations not just by the parties, but also by other participants. It is only when leaders with the stature of true statesmen and stateswomen have lifted their eyes above the immediate disputes to look to the horizon, trying to put into true perspective the material costs but especially the human costs as well, in order to move beyond nationalist and sectarian impulses, that we have seen really meaningful steps being taken. It is thus that today, more than 60 years after the adoption of General Assembly resolution 181 (II) and more than 10 years after the deadline established in Oslo, we again see the hope of a renewal of direct negotiations between the parties, so that there can be a settlement of all matters related to the final status within a year. We therefore now need leaders who are willing to abandon business as usual and thinking in terms of confrontation, and who will instead think in terms of peace and cooperation. There are some positive signs in that regard. In the light of those events, my statement today is different from the statements we customarily make here.

Costa Rica is not unaware of the difficulties facing Israeli and Palestinian leaders. We do not ignore the goals, aspirations, rights, pressures and the weight of history that lead each party to distrust the other and to think that tomorrow, or in three or 30 years' time, they will be in a better position to achieve their ultimate goals. But that is nothing but a mirage and has shown itself to be just that — a mirage, not the way towards an oasis.

The current leaders of Israel and Palestine have found a way to come to the table and reach agreements. Moreover, above and beyond the pressures, both parties are aware of the central features of what must be a final agreement to the conflict. The basis for a solution should be the acceptance of two States within secure and recognized borders whose inhabitants live free from threats of being pushed out of their homes and lands or being kidnapped or subject of rocket attacks — and who instead cooperate to increase production, bolster access to health and education and strengthen the prospects for a peaceful and hopeful future.

There is a possible agreement on the table. It still requires fine-tuning and necessary elements that complement, and not substitute for, the crucial conditions, namely, the establishment of a Palestinian State and the signing of a genuine and secure peace.

As we have said on numerous occasions, Costa Rica believes that the only sustainable solution to the conflict in the Middle East is one based on absolute respect for international law — not on force. Today, the road to sustainable peace entails respect for international humanitarian law and human rights. The parties should focus on the central aspects of the conflict. That was essentially the message that President Laura Chinchilla brought to her meeting with Israeli President Shimon Peres and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas here at Headquarters in September.

I would like to express our satisfaction with the implicit support expressed by the Arab League at its meeting in Sirte, Libya, for President Abbas to continue negotiations with the Israeli side, despite the end of Israel's unilateral moratorium on construction. However, that hopeful sign is not open-ended. The parties should find a way to relaunch a constructive dialogue.

Costa Rica continues to support the efforts of Palestinian officials to restore Palestinian unity on the basis of the commitments of the Palestine Liberation Organization. While President Abbas and his team have used the guidelines to improve security conditions and free their people from violence, Palestinian unity has been systematically weakened by radical groups that pose an obstacle to the well-being of the people they claim to defend. Israel also needs to be able to count on valid interlocutors who can negotiate and bring an end

to the conflict. In that context, Arab countries are also strategic partners in peacebuilding. They should therefore help the Palestinian Authority to prevent the conflict from becoming a vehicle for the actions of extremists.

We know that that is not an easy process. We also know that the conflict has its roots in disputes both old and new. Costa Rica does not ignore, nor are we disingenuous about, the difficulties involved in reaching agreements to disputes between countries and peoples. But we also know that peoples and leaders come to a moment when they understand that they must put aside some of their aspirations and goals in order to achieve others that are surely more important.

Human lives and the well-being of the children of today and tomorrow are more important than promises to defeat an enemy. In the face of a spirit of confrontation and heated passions, Costa Rica calls for a spirit of peace, understanding and good faith. Let us remove obstacles from our path, be they large or small, and call for agreement on what is necessary and crucial.

If the Organization wishes to play its role in this conflict, it is time that it speak up to encourage those who are reasonable, those who want to find solutions. It is time to silence fanatics and extremists, wherever they come from. Their voices and their evil predictions should be overcome by providing support, tranquillity and confidence to those who in their very homes distrust international diplomacy. We must give them reasons to have faith and to trust. Costa Rica calls upon the parties to give their best and seek a meeting of the wills.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Mauritania.

Mr. Ould Hadrami (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): As Chair of the Arab Group for October 2010, I have the pleasure to address the Security Council at this meeting on the item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question".

I would first like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on Uganda's accession to the Council presidency for this month. I also congratulate Turkey on its outstanding presidency of the Council last month. I also thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing.

The Council's debate today is taking place at a time when Israel is continuing its disregard for the international community by its intransigent position of choosing the policy of regular assassinations, displacement, settlement construction and house demolition on a daily basis. That behaviour is brutal, criminal and illegal, and at the same time it constitutes a blatant breach of international law, including the relevant resolutions of the Security Council. Israel's disregard for international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law, constitutes a grave danger, which makes it necessary for the Council to shoulder its responsibility with regard to Israel's intransigence.

The Arab Group affirms that we cannot and should not divorce reality on the ground from the efforts being made to achieve peace through the two-State solution based on the borders of 4 June 1967, in accordance with resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), so as to enable the Palestinian people to exercise their full and legitimate rights, establish a sovereign independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and ensure the return of Palestinian refugees to their lands. We welcome the statement by American President Barack Obama to the General Assembly on 23 September 2010 (see A/65/PV.11), in which he talked about the establishment of a Palestinian State in the course of one year.

The peace efforts in the Middle East — including the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map adopted by Security Council resolution 1515 (2003) and the efforts of the Quartet, which command the full and complete support of the international community — must be bolstered by accelerating their implementation, for the sake of terminating the Arab-Israeli conflict and achieving genuine peace based on the principle of land for peace. Peace will be achieved only with the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living in peace side by side with Israel.

In that connection the Arab Group calls on the Security Council to shoulder its responsibility for the withdrawal by Israel, the occupying Power, from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967, in line with Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the principle of land for peace and the Arab Peace Initiative adopted at the Arab League Summit held in Beirut on 28 March 2002.

The Arab Group calls on the Security Council to force Israel, the occupying Power, to apply the Fourth Geneva Convention, on the protection of civilians in time of war, to its Syrian prisoners, some of whom have been in prison for more than 25 years. The Arab Group would like to draw the Council's attention to Israel's continued intransigence in refusing to comply with resolution 497 (1981), on the Syrian Golan, in its settlement policies, confiscation of land, diversion of water resources and imposition of Israeli nationality on Syrian citizens.

We call on the Council to force Israel, the occupying Power, to withdraw immediately and unconditionally from the Sheba'a farms and the northern part of Al-Ghajar village, as well as from the Kfar Shouba Hills.

With regard to occupied East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, we would like to put an end to clear Israeli violations of international law that aim at creating a Jewish majority in East Jerusalem by evicting Palestinian citizens, forcibly displacing them, revoking their residency permits and replacing them with illegal Israeli settlers.

The Arab Group emphasizes the dangers to which occupied Jerusalem is subjected, particularly al-Haram al-Sharif and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, given the persistent Israeli violations. The continued attempts to demolish the Al-Aqsa Mosque as well as the violations in the city of Jerusalem are part of an Israeli plan to Judaize occupied East Jerusalem, attempts that will undermine peace efforts internationally and regionally.

International reports frequently emerge on the situation in Gaza, all of which emphasize the gravity of the situation inside the Gaza Strip, given the unjust, inhuman, strangulating and illegal blockade that has lasted more than three years, paralyzing Gaza's economy and destroying the health and living and social conditions of more than 1.7 million Palestinians.

The Arab Group demands the unconditional and immediate cessation of all settlement activities, without exception, including those in Jerusalem, as a sine qua non for the achievement of peace. We call upon Israel to immediately, without delay, lift the inhuman blockade of Gaza. Negotiations can never resume as long as settlement activity by Israel, the occupying Power, continues. The international community, particularly the Security Council, must grapple with the unjust stance of Israel and should decisively reject Israel's provocative and destructive position. Israel should abide by international law, because the alternative threatens not only the peace process but also international peace and security.

Last but not least, the Arab Group is of the view that the international community, particularly the Security Council, must strongly call upon Israel, the occupying Power, to halt all its blatant violations of international law, including international humanitarian law and human rights law. Israel should cease settlement activities and return to sincere negotiations to establish an independent, sovereign Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living side by side with Israel. It should completely and unconditionally withdraw from all occupied Arab territories. The Security Council should redouble its efforts and take further concrete and effective measures at this critical juncture in the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Ms. Lalama (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): Ecuador is pleased that the Security Council has once again provided an opportunity for an update on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, and congratulates you, Sir, on your conduct of the debate. We also wish to thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing.

Ecuador associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

I am pleased to confirm once again Ecuador's position on the conflict in the Middle East, and that is total respect for the norms and principles of international law, especially in matters of the peaceful resolution of conflicts; condemnation of the use and threat of use of force; and compliance with the resolutions of the United Nations and its subsidiary bodies. In that vein, we support all the resolutions of the Security Council.

True to that commitment, my delegation condemns the acts of violence that continue in the region, because not only do they violate international law, but they also make it difficult to reach understanding between the parties.

The crisis in which we find ourselves forces us to seek actions and decisions to achieve peace. That requires that Israel respect the law and the resolutions

of the United Nations. The people need the international community, in accordance with humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions, to demand, once and for all call in a clear and firm way, that Israel cease all harassment activities in the region and stop the settlement activity that it conducts by force in the area, including in East Jerusalem.

The settlements are illegal and unjustifiable. They exacerbate tensions, run counter to the principle of land for peace, which has been supported by the international community since 1979, and hamper the peace process between the parties.

If Israel rejects the efforts, appeals and calls of the international community in such a way as to prevent the peace negotiations, then the Security Council should take concrete action — as should all the relevant organs of the United Nations — so as to ensure that Israel suffers the consequences of the violations and crimes it has perpetrated, especially in Gaza and East Jerusalem.

My delegation renews its condemnation of the acts being provoked in the region, not only because they violate international law but also and most importantly because they block understanding between the parties.

The region cries out for a solution. We urge the parties to come to a settlement of the conflict that is peaceful, just, lasting and comprehensive, and to make efforts to re-establish the dialogue that will lead — via the effective fulfilment of the Madrid commitments, the Israeli initiative and implementation of the Road Map — to achieving stability and peace in a region in which two States, Israel and Palestine, must coexist side by side within secure and recognized borders.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.